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Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia

Summary

The present report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). It is the second report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Somalia presented to the Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Covering the period from 16 March 2007 to 15 March 2008, it follows my first report (S/2007/259) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/14).

The report stresses that the level of grave violations against children in Somalia has been increasing over the past year, particularly with regard to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; the killing, maiming and rape of children; and the denial of humanitarian access to children. Over the past year, insecurity and violence in central and southern Somalia have risen, as Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces continue to battle anti-Government armed groups. Mogadishu has been most affected by the conflict. In addition, a regional border dispute between Somaliland and Puntland has added to the overall insecurity in the country. In the absence of rule of law, crimes against civilians, including children, continue to be committed with impunity.

The precarious and unpredictable security situation in Somalia presents a challenge to the provision of a definitive account of violations and perpetrators. The difficulty of this task has been compounded by attacks on humanitarian personnel and the remote location of the United Nations country team, in Nairobi.

The report cites a number of parties to the conflict responsible for recruiting and using child soldiers and committing grave violations against children, such as the Transitional Federal Government and various factions of the anti-Government forces, including remnants of the Union of Islamic Courts and the Al-Shabaab group. Also, children are being killed and maimed as a result of military actions by Ethiopian forces in the course of confrontations with anti-Government forces and civilian demonstrators. There has been an increase in reported cases of rape and other grave sexual violence against children since my last report.

The report contains a series of recommendations with a view to securing strengthened action for the protection of children in Somalia.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report specifies grave violations of child rights, as referred to in Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), by parties to the armed conflict in Somalia between 16 March 2007 and 15 March 2008 as a follow-up to my first report, presented on 7 May 2007 (S/2007/259). It also provides an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/14) issued pursuant to my first report.

2. Owing to the extremely volatile security situation in Somalia, the United Nations country team and the monitoring and reporting task force established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) are based outside the country, in Nairobi. Central and southern Somalia, where the vast majority of grave child rights violations by parties to the armed conflict occur, remain phase IV security environments, with Mogadishu and the most southern area, near the Kenyan border, in phase V. These security levels have severely limited humanitarian access for international and national protection officials, severely hampering systematic monitoring and reporting on the six types of grave violations against children cited in resolution 1612 (2005). The implementation of other aspects of Security Council resolutions regarding children and armed conflict is also limited, including systematic dialogue with parties to the conflict and action to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers and other grave violations of children's rights. Therefore, the incidents of violations cited in the present report are indicative of the gravity and scale of the violations against children.

3. The data on incidents of grave child rights violations included in the present report have been compiled from information of the monitoring and reporting Task Force, which also acts as the protection monitoring network, composed of relevant United Nations agencies and child protection partners. The monitors conduct confidential, first-hand interviews as a way of verifying initial information received from various sources, such as members of local child protection and human rights networks, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media reports. Child protection monitoring partners also work at the local level to refer victims to necessary services and undertake advocacy interventions.

4. While some of the reported child rights violations by parties to the conflict resulted from inter-clan fighting, the majority of violations occurred as a result of the conflict between the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian troops and armed groups, including anti-Government and clan-based forces in central and southern Somalia. Children in settlements of internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable, as these areas are not only de facto battlegrounds between the above-mentioned parties, but are also exposed to higher levels of violent crime committed by civilians due to the breakdown of the rule of law and a lack of traditional protective mechanisms in these areas.

II. Political, military and humanitarian situation in Somalia

5. The security situation in Somalia is of serious concern. Mogadishu has been a scene of continued conflict between the Transitional Federal Government forces, supported by Ethiopian troops, and various anti-Government armed groups, including remnants of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC); Al-Shabaab insurgents,

many of them linked to UIC; and the Hawiye clan militias. Although UIC had been defeated by the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces in December 2006, its supporters and other armed groups are continuing to resist the Transitional Federal Government presence in and around Mogadishu. The security situation elsewhere in central and southern Somalia is characterized by clashes between pro- and anti-Transitional Federal Government groups or between factions over the control of land, grazing rights or other resources. Armed groups, some affiliated with UIC, appear to be gaining ground. For example, the radical group Al-Shabaab has grown stronger and obtained increased numbers of weapons, and of a more sophisticated nature. It has set up training camps at Bargal, in Puntland, and there is reason to believe that it intends to expand into areas such as Baidoa. Since February 2008, Al-Shabaab forces have captured several towns, including Wajid and Jowhar, and several villages in the Bay and Hiran regions.

6. In February 2007, the African Union deployed the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a peace support operation in Mogadishu, whose mandate was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in its resolution 1744 (2007). While AMISOM is authorized to have 8,000 African Union troops, there are at present only 1,760 Ugandan forces and 854 peacekeepers from Burundi. One more battalion from Burundi is expected in Somalia by May 2008, which would bring the total African Union troop presence to more than 3,000.

7. The conflict in Mogadishu between the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian armies and anti-Government forces has led to near-daily mortar attacks, explosions of roadside bombs and improvised explosive device attacks. While the capital experiences the most violence, including targeted assassinations, anti-Government attacks have been reported in several regions outside of Mogadishu, such as Kismayo in Lower Juba, Baidoa in the Bay region and Beletweyne in the Hiran region, particularly where there are Ethiopian soldiers or Transitional Federal Government officials and institutions.

8. Opposition to the Ethiopian troop presence in Mogadishu and parts of central and southern Somalia has created a volatile situation and exacerbated existing tensions. The ongoing conflict has seriously constrained humanitarian delivery and emergency operations in central and southern Somalia.

9. Civilians, including children, continue to be the majority of casualties, primarily as a result of crossfire and explosions. Since February 2007, 340,000 people have fled fighting in Mogadishu. In the past year, the humanitarian and nutrition situation in central and southern Somalia, more specifically in the Shabelle regions, has deteriorated. About 1.9 million Somalis (roughly 20 per cent of the population), more than half of whom are internally displaced, are in need of humanitarian assistance. Food supplies have been disrupted, access to clean water and medical assistance has been hindered, and the hospitals that are able to stay open are stretched to capacity.

10. The Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopians launched full-scale military operations to combat the anti-Government forces in Mogadishu in March and April 2007, as well as in November and December 2007. Heavy fighting ensued for several weeks and camps of internally displaced persons and other civilian locations were used by anti-Government forces to fire mortars against the Ethiopians, which led, in turn, to retaliation by the Ethiopians on those civilian areas. This has led to several documented killings of children.

11. Some of the violence between Government and anti-Government forces has been in and around Mogadishu's Bakaraaha market (the country's largest market), and as a result many businesses have closed, affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of families.

12. The National Reconciliation Congress, hosted by the Transitional Federal Government, was originally scheduled for 16 April 2007 but was delayed because of the worsening security situation. The Congress opened in Mogadishu on 15 July 2007 with more than 2,000 politicians and clan elders from Somalia and the Somali diaspora in attendance. However, UIC boycotted the Congress, saying that because of the presence of Ethiopian troops, the capital was not neutral. The Congress was ultimately suspended in August 2007 owing to criticisms of Transitional Federal Government dominance and security problems, such as an attack on the hosting facility that killed five people, including three children.

13. In many places outside Mogadishu, clan leaders act as political heads, and clan militias are regaining power. In 2007, all 10 regions in central and southern Somalia experienced clan conflicts. While many of those clan conflicts revolved around competition over local power or land, some were influenced by national political agendas and all have contributed to the overall insecurity of civilians, particularly children.

14. Somaliland and Puntland have been engaged in a sometimes violent border dispute over two regions, Sanag and Sool. Somaliland, which has declared independence from Somalia, claims legal authority in the two regions under British colonial-era boundaries, but Puntland has effectively controlled parts of Sanag and Sool for years as a result of clan affiliation. This dispute escalated during the reporting period, leaving children in those areas vulnerable to several categories of grave violations.

15. During the reporting period there were also a number of missile strikes by the United States Navy against suspected Al-Qaida operatives near Dobley and in Puntland, resulting in some civilian casualties.

16. Soaring food prices have also exposed the Somali people to increasing hardship, which led to food riots in Mogadishu in April 2008, in which children were involved. United Nations agencies are predicting acute shortages and attendant malnutrition among approximately 20 per cent of the displaced population, with the possibility that as many as 3.6 million Somalis could be dependent on food aid before the end of 2008.

III. Grave violations of children's rights

17. Children continue to be a highly vulnerable group, particularly children in settlements of internally displaced persons. An estimated 600,000 children and their families are in need of emergency humanitarian aid, particularly in Mogadishu. As a direct result of the conflict, Somali children are suffering not only from malnourishment and higher risk of disease, but also exhaustion and emotional trauma. The general lack of basic services has worsened over the reporting period.

18. The availability of large numbers of small arms inside Somalia has led to widespread violence by military and militia personnel, as well as civilians, in a climate of impunity, exacerbating grave violations of children's rights. Violations

against children have occurred in the context of the conflict, but individuals are also taking advantage of the lack of rule of law and the availability of arms to commit violent crimes against children and other vulnerable members of the population.

19. In addition to the challenges of systematic monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children because of poor security and access limitations, there have been no reliable birth records in nearly 20 years to verify the age of victims as a basis for access to services. Moreover, cultural norms establish 15 years as the threshold of adulthood in Somalia, leading to less reporting of abuse of children.

A. Recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups

20. The recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups continues to be a critical concern and challenge, exacerbated by broad cultural acceptance. The Transitional Federal Government and remnants of UIC were cited in my annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2007/757) for recruiting and using children. In addition to those groups, during the period covered by the present report there was further evidence of the recruitment and use of children by the Al-Shabaab forces.

21. The widespread use of children in almost all fighting forces in the country was noted, particularly in Mogadishu. The recruitment of children has been increasing as a result of the conflict between anti-Government groups and the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian troops. Although during the last year there were 64 reports of child recruitment, down from 100 reports over the previous 12-month period, this apparent decrease is not indicative of the high level of child recruitment. The decline is attributable in part to the fact that UIC no longer controls Mogadishu. During its control in 2006 it engaged in mass recruitment of children in schools which was simpler to monitor. Moreover, the exact number of children recruited or involved in the hostilities cannot easily be verified, as there is a lack of access to children who are actively engaged in the conflict. In addition, there is no birth registration in Somalia, making it difficult to determine the age of an adolescent or young person involved with an armed group.

22. Children over the age of 15 are considered adults, and therefore it is culturally acceptable for boys to carry arms and for girls to work, usually in a domestic or logistics capacity, for armed groups. In addition, the nomadic and clan-based structure of traditional Somali life means that children have been expected to defend family or clan property. Displacement, abandonment, neglect, orphanhood and destitution have made children, especially those living on the streets, particularly vulnerable to recruitment.

23. The administration of Middle Shabelle region has acknowledged that it has children in its military ranks. Specifically, children fighting for the Transitional Federal Government were reportedly seen training at Baledogle airport, where the Transitional Federal Government has a base. Furthermore, the Transitional Federal Government has reportedly mobilized clan leaders in Lower Shabelle to recruit youth, including children, into its forces. A 13-year-old boy, whose parents had died and whose grandmother could not support the family, was recruited near the Baledogle airport by the Transitional Federal Government and is now stationed at

the Hides and Skins Centre[1] in Mogadishu, following three months of military training. A 16-year-old girl said that she wanted to be a Transitional Federal Government soldier because her parents could not support her and her siblings. She trained for three weeks in Hilweyne and is now officially in the military. A 14-year-old boy, whose parents died in the fighting, works at a checkpoint for the Transitional Federal Government and earns 30,000 Somali shillings ($0.50) a day.

24. There are also reported cases of recruitment and use of children by remnant groups of UIC. However, the challenges outlined above, such as high levels of insecurity, lack of access to children and lack of proper birth registration, have made it difficult to verify incidents of recruitment and use and establish the direct responsibility of those groups.

25. Anti-Government forces, in particular groups describing themselves as Al-Shabaab, are also recruiting children into armed conflict and military operations. For example, children have been used to plant roadside bombs and other explosive devices, leading to a few deaths and several injuries among the children themselves. It has been reported that street children are being used for the planting of these devices, frequently without their knowledge. It has also been reported that Al-Shabaab is training children as young as 8 years of age in special camps to plant bombs and carry out assassinations, offering a financial reward for those acts. This training is provided in many cities, including El Adde, Bu'ale and Balad. Al-Shabaab is also going into madrasas and Koranic schools to recruit children into armed conflict. For example, in September 2007, a child trained by Al-Shabaab killed a Transitional Federal Government officer near a school in Hamar Jahid. As a result of recruiting in schools, learning institutions are sometimes regarded as potential targets by the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian troops.

B. Killing and maiming of children

26. Children have been the victims of armed violence in many regions in Somalia, particularly those living in settlements of internally displaced persons that are close to military or government buildings. During the reporting period, violence between Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces and anti-Government groups, including Al-Shabaab, remnants of UIC and Hawiya and other clan militias has led to high civilian casualties, particularly in Mogadishu. Over 1,850 people, including 217 children, wounded by weapons, were examined by one hospital in Mogadishu alone. More than 125 children were recorded by protection monitors as having been killed during the reporting period — up from 82 reported from 16 March 2006 to 15 March 2007. The risks posed to children in Mogadishu by indiscriminate shelling, mortar attacks and gunfire increased during the first months of 2008. Thirty-three children, many under 10 years of age, have been reported seriously wounded in the crossfire in just two districts of Mogadishu between February and mid-May 2008 alone.

27. Child protection monitors have reported cases of children being injured or killed as a result of crossfire, mortar attacks, grenade launches or the rare targeted

[1] The Hides and Skins Centre was the location of a government agency that supported the tanning of leather when that was an important economic activity in the country. Although the tanning activities are defunct, the name remains.

shooting, while in their homes, on the street, in the market, walking home from school or playing football.

28. On 1 July 2007, a 7-year-old boy was killed when he was caught in the crossfire of the Transitional Federal Government forces in the Dayniile district of Mogadishu. In retaliation for a roadside bomb that exploded as they were passing, Transitional Federal Government troops opened fire, killing a pregnant woman and a young boy on 15 July 2007. A 14-year-old girl was shot and killed by the Ethiopian military on 9 October 2007 when she was demonstrating against the Ethiopian military presence in Somalia. On 2 November 2007, a 14-year-old boy, along with five others, was also fired on and killed by the Ethiopian forces in Mogadishu during anti-Ethiopian demonstrations.

29. On 8 February 2008, two boys (one 8 years old, the other 7) were shot by Transitional Federal Government security forces in front of the 15th May High School, where those forces were stationed. The boys had reportedly approached the troops to ask for leftover food, but the soldiers had mistakenly assumed the boys were about to launch grenades.

30. Several deaths of children were also attributed to anti-Government and clan militia members. For example, on 8 November 2007, a 1-year-old baby was killed in a crossfire between Ethiopian and Transitional Federal Government forces and anti-Government armed groups as her mother was trying to escape. On 1 December 2007, a grenade launched by anti-Government groups to attack Transitional Federal Government forces in the Bakaraaha market killed two people, including an 8-year-old boy.

31. There is a persistent danger to children from explosive remnants of war, landmines and other such devices. The numbers of unexploded ordnance accidents involving children in and around Mogadishu increased following the bombardment of the capital by Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces in April 2007. Between January and June 2007 there were more than 28 landmine accidents in southern Somalia, killing 8 children and wounding 10, and 33 incidents involving bombs or unexploded ordnance that killed 25 children and wounded 46.

32. On 6 May 2007, two children were killed and eight others wounded when a device exploded while they were playing in Mogadishu's Dayniile neighbourhood. On 8 May 2007, three children were wounded when a landmine exploded near a school in the Jilib district, and a 10-year-boy was killed, along with four Government soldiers, in a roadside bomb explosion on 27 May 2007. Further, on 18 March 2008, three children were killed and one injured while playing with unexploded ordnance in Balguri, Afgooye, in Lower Shabelle.

33. On 3 July 2007, three children died and two were injured while they were reportedly searching for remnants of explosives that AMISOM troops had detonated in the Jezira district, in the south-western part of Mogadishu, and on 6 July 2007, a piece of unexploded ordnance detonated killing eight people, including five children, in central Mogadishu. On 8 July 2007, eight children were killed after stumbling upon unexploded ordnance hidden in garbage in the capital.

C. Rape and other sexual violence

34. Reported cases of rape and other sexual assaults carried out against children increased from 115 last year to 128 during the period from 16 March 2007 to 15 March 2008. Of the rape cases of children reported by child protection monitors, only a minority are alleged to have been carried out by parties to the conflict. Nonetheless, the continued fighting has rendered women and children more vulnerable to sexual violence because of displacement, destitution, the breakdown of the rule of law and the re-emergence of armed groups and freelance militias — all a result of the ongoing conflict. There are reports of victims as young as 3 months old. Most at risk are women and girls living in open and unprotected settlements for internally displaced persons, particularly those who belong to a clan that is a minority in the area where they are living.

35. In the Raf and Raho and Tuur Jalle settlements for internally displaced persons in Bosaso there were 31 cases of rape against children reported in one month alone. In the Bulo Mingis settlement in Bosaso 25 rapes of children were reported in October 2007. In the first week of November 2007, three girls, aged 7, 12 and 18 years, were raped in the settlement. Forty children were raped and 12 children experienced attempted rape in five settlements for internally displaced persons in Somaliland during 2007, including Hargeisa and Sheikh-nur. Internally displaced persons in most settlements reported that the perpetrators were fellow internally displaced persons, people from the host community and the police.

36. Though most of the reported rapes have been carried out by civilians, there are several reports of rape by parties to the conflict, including militia members and Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian troops. In particular, roadblocks set up and controlled by militias or gangs are locations where many incidents of sexual violence have reportedly occurred. In May 2007, militia members stopped a minibus at a checkpoint and raped eight women and five girls. On 15 April 2007, an 18-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped by Ethiopian soldiers in the Hamar Bille neighbourhood of Mogadishu. On 28 April 2007, a 15-year-old displaced girl was en route to Beletweyne in a passenger car when militia members opened fire. She ran into nearby bushes to escape, but was followed by the militia members and repeatedly raped.

37. There have been several cases of girls raped while fleeing Mogadishu, mostly along the road to Afgooye and Baidoa. In the first half of 2007, there were four such verified cases of girls raped by men dressed in Transitional Federal Government uniforms. In Heliwa district, Transitional Federal Government soldiers were accused of raping four internally displaced women and one teenage girl during what the soldiers claimed was a search for insurgents on 29 July 2007. On 13 October 2007, a 15-year-old girl was told by five armed men in Transitional Federal Government uniforms to fetch the family's valuables and that her brother must leave. When she returned without sufficient valuables, she was raped. On 1 November 2007, a 16-year-old girl was raped by two Transitional Federal Government policemen who were on security patrol.

38. Rapes and other sexual assaults are often carried out with impunity. Traditional and community justice mechanisms frequently ignore the victim and negotiate with members of the perpetrator's clan, proposing a financial settlement (ranging from camels to such sums as $800) to the family of the victim by the perpetrator or his

clan, or marriage of the victim to the perpetrator. Meanwhile, the victim is considered dishonoured.

39. Early or forced marriages are also common practice, which leaves girls vulnerable to rape and sexual assault within wedlock, though it would likely not be reported as such to protection monitors.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

40. Attacks on schools and hospitals have not been a prominent characteristic of the conflict in Somalia, though they appear to be on the rise. In mid-May, for example, a hand grenade exploded near a primary school close to the presidential palace in Mogadishu. There were no casualties. It was also reported that Ethiopian forces occupied the Mohamoud Ahmed Ali secondary school for military purposes between April and July 2007. In July and August 2007, there were reports of raids on schools by Transitional Federal Government forces in Mogadishu. Again, as a result of recruiting in schools by UIC and other anti-Government groups, such as Al-Shabaab, learning institutions are sometimes regarded as potential targets by the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian troops. On 26 July, Transitional Federal Government forces stormed an Islamic school and abducted 4 teachers and 20 students.

41. More recently, on 19 April 2008, during an attack on the Al-Hidayo mosque, Ethiopian forces raided an attached madrasa and detained 50 students under the age of 18 years. Thirty-two of those students were released a few days later; however, at the time of writing, 18 are still being detained by the Central Intelligence Department of the Transitional Federal Government. Their condition, as well as the reason for an extended detention without trial, is unknown.

42. At least 60 per cent of schools in Mogadishu (144 schools in six districts) remain closed, leaving an estimated 50,000 children without instruction. Of the schools that are open, most have seen reduced or sporadic attendance because of poor security, curfews and roadblocks.

43. Hospitals, particularly in Mogadishu, are stretched to capacity and are vulnerable to looting of their supplies. Several hospitals have also been forced to close. In April and May 2007, several hospitals, including the SOS, Al-Hayat and Al-Arafat hospitals, were attacked with mortar rockets. The Al-Arafat hospital is no longer functional following the attack. On 18 August, mortar shells from clashes between Ethiopian and Transitional Federal Government forces and anti-Government forces once again hit the SOS hospital.

E. Abductions

44. Abductions are mainly criminally motivated in Somalia. Often the goal is ransom money, although sometimes girls are abducted to be raped. No abductions by parties to armed conflict have been recorded during the reporting period.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

45. Since the early 1990s, the capital, Mogadishu, has not been sufficiently secure to be used as a base for the United Nations country team; thus, the country team has been operating out of Nairobi, in neighbouring Kenya. The capital and much of the country have been inaccessible to international humanitarian personnel for many years. This has impaired monitoring and accountability of programmes, reduced delivery of aid even during acute humanitarian crises and rendered the local staff and international staff operating in Somalia more vulnerable to attacks.

46. National employees are at greater risk as agencies rely more and more on Somali staff and implementing partners. Key routes that would normally ease humanitarian access have been the scenes of attacks, roadside bomb explosions and assassinations. Aid workers accompanied by armed escorts provided by the Government are vulnerable to attack by anti-Government armed groups, while independent escorts face forcible disarmament by Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces.

47. Checkpoints and roadblocks are a major obstacle, particularly in central and southern Somalia. From January 2007 to February 2008, the number of roadblocks in Somalia has reportedly more than doubled to 396, according to United Nations sources. Of that total, 77 are in Hiran, on the central Somalia coast and in Galgudud. Seventeen of those 77 roadblocks are manned by local militias, and the remaining 60 are reportedly manned by Transitional Federal Government and local government forces. The United Nations is concerned that checkpoints and roadblocks pose an additional challenge to wounded or sick children and women trying to get access to medical assistance in Mogadishu. According to reports, families have been stopped and turned back at checkpoints in the city, particularly at night, while trying to reach medical care.

48. Further disruptions of humanitarian aid have been periodic temporary bans on travel to parts of Somalia by international staff and even United Nations staff members who are Somali nationals. The United Nations further reports that pilots have refused to travel to Mogadishu because of security concerns. In Puntland, in particular, the threat of kidnapping has been quite elevated and has led to periodic travel restrictions. In addition, the Somali border with Kenya remained closed during the reporting period. Permission for the transport of humanitarian cargo to the border is being granted only on an ad hoc basis.

49. A United Nations convoy moving from Baidoa to Mogadishu was set upon by unknown attackers between the towns of Afgooye and Lafole on 20 March 2007. The southern warehouse of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Mogadishu remains inaccessible, as Ethiopian troops positioned in front of it have banned all movement. On 8 February 2008, three hand grenades were launched at the United Nations Mogadishu compound.

50. Owing to a series of kidnapping threats against foreigners in Puntland, there is great concern that aid workers are being viewed as an economic bargaining chip. Two CARE International staff were abducted in southern Puntland on 8 May 2007 and released a week later.

51. The World Health Organization office in Mogadishu was attacked by armed gunmen on 16 May 2007, wounding a guard. On the same day, a roadside bomb

killed four AMISOM troops. On 27 June 2007, two staff members of the International Medical Corps were killed by gunmen in El-Berde. The NGO temporarily suspended all activities in the Bakol region.

52. In July 2007, a Somali staff member of Médecins sans frontières Switzerland was reportedly shot dead by a man wearing a Transitional Federal Government army uniform in the provincial town of Beletweyne, Hiran region. Two female staff members of Médecins sans frontières were kidnapped in Puntland on Christmas Day 2007 and released a week later. In southern Somalia, on 28 January 2008, three Médecins sans frontières staff members were killed near Kismayo hospital when a roadside bomb exploded. Médecins sans frontières evacuated its staff from Kismayo, and by February 2008, it had pulled its foreign staff out of Somalia altogether.

53. Somalia's National Security Service detained the World Food Programme (WFP) officer-in-charge of its Mogadishu office for five days in October 2007, forcing WFP to temporarily suspend food distributions to thousands of people. In February 2008, a German aid worker from German Agro Action was kidnapped on his way to Waqadiriya, in an area claimed by both Puntland and Somaliland. He was released 12 hours later. On 16 February 2008, a private convoy carrying WFP food was stopped and the convoy leader shot and killed by the militia manning the roadblock.

54. Piracy off the coast of Somalia continued to be a problem for aid agencies attempting to deliver food and other supplies. Shipping is the principal and fastest route used by WFP to move large amounts of food aid to Somalia. The International Maritime Bureau reported 31 acts of piracy in 2007 — three against ships carrying WFP food. In May 2007, a Somali guard was killed while helping repulse a pirate attack on a ship that had just delivered WFP food assistance to the Somali port of Merka. Responding to a WFP appeal to the international community and stipulations of Security Council resolution 1772 (2007), the French navy began escorting WFP shipments in November 2007. As a result, WFP was able to bring in enough food to feed 300,000 people for six months and to build up its in-country stocks. At the beginning of 2008, Denmark took over the escort operation.

IV. Dialogue and action plans to redress violations of children's rights

55. The Nairobi-based protection monitoring network Steering Committee (which includes the monitoring and reporting task force established under resolution 1612 (2005)) continues to coordinate activities around joint advocacy and response to negative trends in the protection of civilians, with a special focus on women, children, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups. There is a protection cluster working group in Somaliland and Puntland, as well as in Baidoa and Mogadishu, that meets monthly as conditions allow. There is also a sub-cluster on gender-based violence in Baidoa.

56. Child protection monitoring partners, all of which are Somali NGOs in partnership with UNICEF, are members of regional child protection networks to which they report violations. The child protection networks take decisions on responses to violations at the regional level. These responses often take the form of

dialogue and advocacy with local government, the traditional leaders and sometimes perpetrators. Other network members are sometimes able to intervene with prevention activities, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also has a network of over 15 monitoring partners that report on human rights violations, particularly in environments where internally displaced persons are located. UNICEF and UNHCR have continued to invest in the monitoring network by training in interview techniques, confidentiality issues, and appropriate responses and advocacy.

57. UNICEF continues to support Somali NGOs that are conducting dissemination and advocacy sessions with parliamentarians and other office-bearers from the Transitional Federal Government, focusing on the illegality under international law of using children in conflict, as well as other child protection issues. During 2007, targeted advocacy on child recruitment took place with Members of Parliament, and specifically with the Speaker of the Parliament; the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights; and the Justice Minister and the Directors General of the Ministries of Interior, Women and Family Affairs, and Education.

58. Discussions between UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs on support for a Government-led advocacy and action plan against the use of children in conflict have been ongoing throughout the reporting period. However, progress has been set back by changes in the cabinet and the location of the Ministries towards the end of 2007. It is hoped that during 2008, the Ministry will be able to take further its commitments to the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups of February 2007.

59. On 20 September 2007, heads of United Nations agencies met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government to discuss improved security and access to humanitarian aid for those displaced by the ongoing conflict in Mogadishu. From the start of 2007 to the time of the meeting, the number of people needing assistance rose by half a million, to 1.5 million. UNICEF also issued an appeal in November 2007 to all parties to the conflict to allow civilians and children in need of medical assistance to pass safely through checkpoints.

60. On 1 November 2007, the acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia directly appealed to the highest levels of the Transitional Federal Government to respect international humanitarian law, especially regarding the distinction between civilians and combatants during times of armed conflict; to stop further forced displacement or threats of it; to allow safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid; and to ensure the safety of all humanitarian staff and assets.

61. In December 2007, the Executive Director of UNICEF called for the creation of safe zones so that children and families could have access assistance and find stability in Somalia. The UNICEF representative in Somalia recommended that schools open in Mogadishu and serve as "safe havens".

62. UNICEF and other agencies have advocated with the Transitional Federal Government for the earliest possible release of children still in detention, and are working with local partners to reach those already released with appropriate support, including psychosocial interventions.

63. Consultations with the strategic assessment team led by the Department of Political Affairs, supported by the Peacebuilding Support Office, and including the

Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies, were held in January 2008. Those consultations coincided with a fact-finding mission to Somalia led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop contingency plans for the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers and to decide on further support for AMISOM. The subsequent report of the Secretary-General was endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1814 (2008), emphasizing an integrated United Nations strategy in Somalia to align political, security and programmatic efforts, and an assessment of the capacity of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia to monitor and enhance the protection of human rights.

V. Follow-up and programmatic response to violations

64. A joint United Nations Task Force on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, headed by UNDP, has recently been established. In conformity with integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards, the terms of reference of the Task Force provide that children released from armed forces will be reintegrated into general society when the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process takes place. To date, however, no concrete disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes have been initiated, since the conflict continues and the parties have expressed no willingness to demobilize forces. However, throughout the reporting period, UNICEF advocated against child recruitment, with a focus on prevention.

65. In late 2007, the regional administration in Jowhar (Middle Shabelle) began a small-scale demobilization process. The Governor of Middle Shabelle has admitted to the presence of children in the Government forces and has requested the assistance of the United Nations in reintegrating them once the demobilization process is complete. UNICEF has made a commitment to help link these under-18-year-olds with existing services where they exist, in the absence of a formal reintegration programme.

66. UNICEF and Save the Children UK carried out predeployment training for AMISOM troops in their countries of origin during 2007. The training focused on the protection of civilians (especially children), HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse and exploitation, and pertinent aspects of international humanitarian law. During 2008, UNICEF intends to support the creation of a child protection unit at the AMISOM base in Mogadishu.

67. In early June 2007, the United Nations country team conducted advocacy after the detention of more than 20 children from the school at the Al-Huuda mosque in Mogadishu. UNICEF met with the Mayor of Mogadishu, the Police Commissioner and others, and once it was clear that the children had all been released, NGO partners of UNICEF conducted some psychosocial care and follow-up support, as well as family tracing and reunification.

68. Community mobilization against sexual violence, child recruitment and other issues affecting children in conflict (such as mine-risk education), as well as family tracing and psychosocial care and support, have been offered to families displaced by the latest round of violence.

69. Several aid agencies are also working through partners to provide emergency education facilities to displaced children, with a focus on the role schooling can play in preventing child recruitment, child labour and crimes committed by minors.

70. In January 2008, the Women and Child Care Organization of Jowhar organized a symposium to provide communities with a forum to discuss the harmful effects of armed conflict on children, stressing the obligations of parents. Organizers were encouraged by the attendance of the religious scholars and the Jowhar District Commissioner, who promised that the Middle Shabelle administration was committed to ensuring that children were not recruited into local militias.

71. UNICEF has supported ongoing advocacy through radio to appeal to the parties to the conflict to respect the rights of children and other civilians. In particular, since June 2007, mine-risk education spots have been aired on stations that reach Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. One of the main radio stations in Mogadishu with coverage in six regions of central and southern Somalia has been broadcasting messages and discussions against child recruitment and providing information on services available for survivors of sexual violence.

72. An assessment was carried out by the United Nations Mine Action Service in Mogadishu in mid-2007. Following the recommendations of that report, UNDP has established a mine action centre in Baidoa, which is now training and deploying clearance teams and supporting AMISOM troops in the disposal of bombs and unexploded ordnance in Mogadishu. UNICEF is providing technical assistance to the mine action centre to ensure that mine-risk education informs children about the threat posed by unexploded ordnance and landmines.

VI. Recommendations

73. All relevant parties are urged, as a matter of priority, to implement the recommendations of my first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2007/259) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/14), and to comply without further delay with the resolutions of the Security Council on children and armed conflict to halt the grave child rights violations and abuses for which they have been cited.

74. The Transitional Federal Government is strongly urged to stop all new recruitment of children and to demobilize unconditionally all children who participate in any capacity in its armed forces. It is called upon to renounce the recruitment and use of children in armed forces, and to affirm its adherence to and respect for international standards on the use of children in armed conflict. Furthermore, as recommended by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Transitional Federal Government is encouraged to sign and ratify as early as possible the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as to ratify the Convention itself and align national legislation with that commitment (see S/AC.51/2007/14).

75. The Transitional Federal Government and all other armed forces or groups in Somalia are once again urged to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to the protection of civilian

populations and objects during combat. All parties to the conflict are called upon to make all efforts to minimize civilian casualties during fighting.

76. The Transitional Federal Government and other appropriate authorities in Somalia are urged to redress the prevailing culture of impunity, to launch investigations into all incidents of grave child violations and to bring the perpetrators to justice, as reiterated by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (see S/AC.51/2007/14). All appropriate authorities are also encouraged to increase child protection, law enforcement and judicial capacities.

77. The Transitional Federal Government is urged to end the detention of children in violation of international standards and to ensure the immediate release of the remaining children to child protection partners.

78. As recommended by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Transitional Federal Government, with necessary assistance from the international community, is strongly encouraged to control the proliferation of small arms, as their ready availability renders children more vulnerable to grave violations and other crimes (see S/AC.51/2007/14).

79. The Transitional Federal Government is also urged to engage in a genuine reconciliation process with all factions within the country to create conditions for security and stability, which would allow for the development and reconstruction of Somalia. All parties are also urged to engage in a renewed reconciliation process to explicitly agree to child protection provisions and to focus on post-conflict rehabilitation for children.

80. Remnants of UIC forces, clan militias and all other armed groups are strongly urged to cease the recruitment and use of children in their ranks and to demobilize unconditionally all children currently participating in their forces.

81. The Ethiopian forces are urged to refrain from indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including but not limited to schools and hospitals, and to ensure that all necessary precautions are taken to minimize child casualties during military operations.

82. The Ethiopian authorities are urged to systematically investigate allegations of grave violations against children by their forces and to take necessary action against those who wilfully commit such violations, including rape and sexual violence.

83. In accordance with the 1992 arms embargo on Somalia concerning the provision of military material and other forms of military support, all relevant Member States, including Ethiopia, are once again called upon to immediately stop the exportation of arms to Somalia, including exports in violation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

84. The authorities of Somaliland and Puntland are urged to end hostilities along the border between Sanag and Sool and to engage in comprehensive negotiations to bring the dispute to a peaceful end.

85. The continued lack of humanitarian access in Somalia, particularly in the central and southern regions, is a serious concern. All parties to the conflict are called upon to ensure unhindered and safe humanitarian access for children, to allow the free passage of humanitarian aid to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature

and impartiality of aid and to respect the markings and emblems of humanitarian organizations without distinction.

86. The Government of Kenya is urged to open its border with Somalia to facilitate access to humanitarian aid, while putting in place necessary screening procedures to allow asylum-seekers, particularly women and children, to find refuge and protection.

87. In the light of the deployment of its AMISOM troops, the African Union is strongly encouraged to include in its mandate the provision of child protection advisers and to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children in armed conflict to allow for prompt advocacy and effective response to such situations. The African Union is urged to fulfil its troop-deployment commitment to assist in establishing security and aid in the reconciliation process.

88. Given continued grave violations against children in Somalia, I call upon all responsible United Nations bodies to ensure that the protection of children is addressed as a priority in the ongoing peace process and to strengthen the protection dialogue with relevant parties to the conflict. Furthermore, child protection advisers should be incorporated in the United Nations Political Office for Somalia, and in any future deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, to serve as interlocutors with child protection actors.

89. As expressed in my annual report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/62/609-S/2007/757), the Security Council is encouraged to refer to the International Criminal Court, for investigation and prosecution, violations against children in armed conflict that fall within its jurisdiction.

90. Cognizant of the significant access and security constraints, the United Nations country team is called upon to continue to establish systematic protection dialogue with all parties to the conflict with the goal of creating concrete, time-bound action plans to end all grave violations against children, particularly the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

91. The international community is encouraged to dedicate the required and timely support and resources to Somalia for child protection, including through a more systematic approach to strengthen local capacity in advocacy, community awareness and response to child rights violations within the country and in settlements of internally displaced persons and refugees.

92. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict is requested to undertake a mission to Somalia in the near future to assess first-hand the situation for children and the implementation of the recommendations in my reports and those of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.